

Syllable weight, word length and compound accentuation in Japanese

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Abstract

This paper discusses the relation between word length and syllable weight (syllable structure) in compound accentuation in Tokyo Japanese.

The traditional literature reports that there are two phonological conditions concerning compound accentuation in this language, namely, (i) word length and (ii) the accent pattern of N2 (the second member of a compound) (McCawley 1968, Akinaga 1985, 2001, Poser 1990, etc.). I will show that **syllable weight (and structure)** in N2 should newly be added as an indispensable factor in compound accentuation, appealing to the notion of weight sensibility (Prince & Smolensky 1993/2004).

It is known that compounds exhibit asymmetrical accentuations according to the phonological length of N2; in cases in which N2 is three or four moras long and is unaccented, the initial syllable of N2 is accented as exemplified in (1a), while when N2 is five moras long or longer and is unaccented, the accent pattern of N2 (i.e. unaccented) is preserved as in (1b) (Tanaka & Kubozono 1999).

- (1) a. bookaru⁰ : riido-bóokaru 'lead vocal'
b. haamonika⁰ : kenban-haamonika⁰ 'keyboard harmonica'

However, different accentuations are often observed. Although N2 is more than four moras long in (2a), the initial syllable of N2 is accented in the same way as in (1a), instead of preserving the unaccented pattern of N2 (=1b). In (2b), moreover, not only is the preservation of the unaccented pattern of N2 violated, but also the position of the accent differs from what would be predicted by the traditional compound accent rule (CAR) in that it is not the initial syllable of N2 that is accented.

- (2) a. baiorin⁰ : faasuto-báiorin 'first violin'
b. rikoodaa⁰ : sopurano-rikóodaa 'soprano recorder'

In this paper, I will give a new explanation of (1a,b)~(2a,b) without contradictions, from the viewpoints of word length and syllable weight (syllable structure).

When N2 is three or four moras long, the default compound accent (i.e. the initial syllable) generally coincides with the default loanword accent that the syllable structure of N2 originally predicts. When N2 has five moras or longer, on the other hand, the default accent position in N2 differs from default compound accent depending on syllable weight, expect when the syllable structure is HLH (2a).

When the default loanword accentual syllable is heavy as in (2a,b), it attracts the accent by weight sensibility (Prince & Smolensky 1993/2004), while when light as in (1b), the syllable cannot attract it and the unaccented pattern of N2 is preserved. The reason why the compound in (2a) apparently follows the CAR is because the initial syllable is a default position and heavy at the same time.

In the last part of the paper, I will try to present a formal analysis of the data within the framework of Optimality Theory.

References

- McCawley, J. D. 1968. *The Phonological Component of a Grammar of Japanese*. Mouton: The Hague.
- Prince, A. & Smolemsky, P. 1993/2004. *Optimality Theory: Constraint Interaction in Generative Grammar*. Blackwell.